7: Taylor & Moore E-4, 5 (1930-1937) 1948
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A NOTE ON DOMINICAN BASKETRY AND ITS ANALOGUES*

DOUGLAS TAYLOR AND HARVEY C. MOORE

TYPES AND TECHNIQUES

(By Douglas Taylor)

285 BASKETRY of the Island Carib is relatively little known, and descriptions of the materials and technical details are almost wholly unrecorded. The following notes are offered to remedy this situation.

824 285 *Ischnosiphon arouma*, the lárumą of the Dominica Carib (< Island Carib -ualamą), is today found growing wild in the rain-forests of the island's interior, although, for greater convenience, basket-makers sometimes plant it nearer home. This little palm here attains maturity in about a year at a height of 12 to 15 feet. After flowering, the leafy crowns gradually bend and bear the slender stems to earth, send forth roots, and so propagate the parent stock. The Carib recognize a secondary variety known as lárumą tukusię which, they say, does not exceed five feet in height. Because it provides such short strands, it can be utilized only for making small ornamental baskets, for which work it is, moreover, especially suited by reason of the facility with which it can be split.

When they have attained their maximum growth, the stems are cut; split into two or four segments and most of the soft pith removed; then tied in bundles of from 70 to 100 stems and carried down to the coast, where they are spread out in the sun to dry.[1] When they have acquired by this process the reddish brown color characteristic of the island's basketry, they are tied back into bundles, ready, for the most part, to be stored until required on the cross-beams or suspended from the ridge-pole of the basket-makers hut or mwiną. When black strands are wanted for decorative purposes, a smaller bundle of sun-

* Because of difficulties of communication, Mr Taylor has had no opportunity to read proof of this article—Editor.

171 1 Apparently this procedure is entirely foreign to Guiana, where only freshly cut stems are used, either green or—after scraping off the outer skin-like bark—stained with various coloring matter. Roth indeed says that exposure to the sun would render the lárumą brittle and useless. On the other hand, the Dominica Carib claim that strands made from green stems would soon spoil, and that work done with such would "open," that is, show gaps owing to subsequent shrinkage. There appears to be a degree of reason on both sides: strands woven while green tending to shrink or go mouldy; while sun-dried stems give strands which are of course more apt to break off when much bent. Perhaps this is one reason why "hour-glass pattern" technique is unknown, and why the making of cassava-squeezers (rukuna, or matapi) is almost a lost art.

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above) has been woven in this design into belts 4 cm wide, with the portugais running right down the middle, but this may be a new application of an old pattern.

While Roth's "hour-glass pattern" technique is quite unknown to Dominica Carib of today, at least a twill weave not unlike that described and illustrated by him for Guiana in section 432 of the *Additional Studies* is employed here by a very few Carib in decorative baskets otherwise similar to those whose manu-

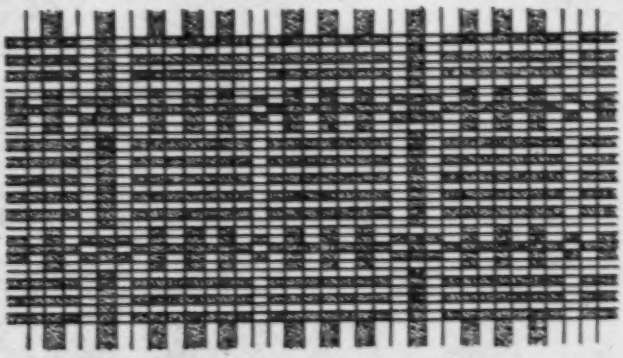

FIG. 4. Checker design in fine work.

facture has just been described. But whereas the twill of Roth's specimen is of the one-under-and-over-three type usual in Guiana basketry, all those I have seen in Dominica are based on the one-under-and-over-two pattern commonly employed here in making fans and hebiket (cassava-sifters). Moreover, both mats and skins of the Dominica specimens are twilled (although the former are in plain herringbone), whereas in Guiana, according to Roth, the mats are usually in wicker weft. In such baskets, warp and weft are indistinguishable except in being usually of different colors (see Figure 5). If the warp is taken to be white and the weft black, then successive wefts starting at the same warp pass as follows (brackets indicate introductory point of weft and are not to be repeated); u equals under, o equals over: A-ul, o2, u2, o2, (repeat); B-(u2), o2, u2, o3, u2, o2, u3 (repeat); C-o1, u2, o2, u2 (repeat); D-(o2), u2, o2, u3, o2, u2, o3 (repeat). The next four wefts repeat this arrangement (ABCD), then follow two sets of four wefts each in the order ADCB. The entire formula may thus be represented by ABCD, ABCD, ADCB, where A, B, C, and D follow the picks indicated above.

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Starting again with that which is uppermost, or last bent, each strand is now rebent inward and downward, and woven back into the fan along a course parallel to and on the same path as that which it followed in the original diamond. This process, which produces an edging at right angles to that just completed, as well as filling in the body of the fan, is continued on either side until the desired length is obtained (see Figure 8, *b*).

When this stage is reached, a last strand is bent over but not interwoven with the others. Over and round this underlying strand as foundation, the next two strands taken together and superimposed, are wrapped, brought up on the top side of their own standing part, and bent under the others parallel with the foundation strand (see Figure 8, *c*). These two stranda, together with the foundation strand, now form a composite foundation over which the next two strands are wrapped superimposed, and which they themselves then join. Each successive pair of strands thus encircles the bundle formed by its predecessors, and then itself joins the bundle, which thus comes to contain all the strands on its side of the fan, and to form an apex with those from the other side. The two bundles are finally trimmed, joined together, and overcast so as to form a ring.

COMPARATIVE NOTES ON THE BASKET TYPES

(By Harvey C. Moore)

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The similarities suggested above between the basketry of the Dominican Carib and that described by Roth for the Guiana Indians causes one to conjecture on other areas possessing similar basketry. Wissler[3] long ago commented upon the similarities of design and materials of cane baskets in Louisiana and northern South America. Commenting upon baskets in some Pacific Islands that had similar designs, he warned about assuming diffusion from designs only. However, there was in addition to similarity of design the factor that cane splints were used for mats and baskets in the southeastern United States, the West Indies, and the basins of the Amazon and Orinoco.[4] Gower warns that since the technique involved in cane-splint basketry was rather simple, its presence need not mean diffusion from only one center of invention.[5] However, it was present in the Muskhogean area, among the Yuchi of Georgia and South Carolina, in Florida, among Taino and Island Carib of the West Indies, and in northeastern South America.[6]

3 Wissler, *The American Indian*, p. 78.
4 *Idem*, p. 51.
5 Gower, *Northern and Southern Affiliations*, p. 17.
6 *Idem*, p. 49.

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Speck[7] states the uniformity of type, weave, and design of cane basketry in the southern and eastern United States point to its being a single art, with a center for North America in the lower Mississippi region. He goes on to mention possible Antillean or South American connections. A striking feature of similarity is the complex "double weave," although no waterproofing by the insertion of a leaf-layer such as *Ischnosiphon* has been reported for the Southeast.

That a cultural extension of cane basketry into southern Central America existed will be demonstrated later in this paper.

A brief exposition of specific points of similarity and dissimilarity between the Southeast, Antilles, and northeastern South America will now be given.

In the Southeast, the Yuchi[8] has two types of basketry, one like the Algonkian tribes and one using cane. The latter type was characteristic of the Southeast and Gulf area. The material was cane *(Arundinaria)*, nearly always twilled, and with bottom and sides possessing differing patterns.[9] Swanton[10] says that among the Chitimacha, on the Mississippi in Louisiana, the cane was split with the teeth and woven in two layers, forming a double basket—sometimes dyed black, yellow, or red. The Chitimacha[11] (at least in their basketry as revived in historic times) wove in two thicknesses with the glossy surface out and used the twilled pattern. All the baskets had a cover fitting closely over the lower part. Merwin was reminded by it of the material, weave, and uses of the basketry of the Guiana Indians.

The Hitchiti of the Lower Creeks split and stripped cane, soaked it in warm water before using, and dyed strips in advance.[12]

The Cherokee[13] of western North Carolina used the "double weave" of two splints of cane in a diagonal twill with the smooth outer surfaces exposed on the inside and outside of the basket. The Cherokee designs occurred among other tribes of the southern or Gulf area, but the designs of the latter had more elaboration.[14] Adair[15] mentions the Cherokee's dividing the swamp canes into long, thin, narrow splinters, dyed several colors. Among the types was a neat

7 Speck, *Decorative Art*, p. 63.
8 Speck, *Ethnology of the Yuchi*, p. 31.
9 *Idem*, p. 32.
10 Swanton, *Indian Tribes of Lower Mississippi*, p. 348.
11 Merwin, *Basketry of the Chitimacha*, p. 34.
12 Swanton, *Indians of Southeastern United States*, p. 605.
13 Speck, *Decorative Art*, p. 59.
14 *Idem*, p. 62.
15 Williams, *Adair's History*, p. 456.

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of eight or ten baskets. Wissler[16] lists baskets of cane and splints as among the distinctive traits of the Southeast, with the double or nested basket and the basket meal sieve as special forms.

The Seminole of Florida, although not significant basket makers, used the swamp cane and the fan palmetto for making flat baskets and sieves.[17] The Pile Dwellers of the Florida Keys left remains of wattled cane matting and Cushing[18] deduces the people understood basketry making.

Hence it appears that cane was used in similar manner throughout the Southeast for baskets (and also for mats and cradles).[19] Almost everywhere the work was by women.[20]

Turning to South American basketry, we find that the Macusi[21] (Central Carib) used palm frond splints for baskets to store farina. These were lined with leaves, and covered with leaves and splints interlaced. The men made maranta plant splints (scraped and used naturally, bleached, or stained black) into shoulder or trinket baskets with telescoping lids. The Waiwai (Central Carib) made the best ones. The Wapisiana[23] (Central Arawak) used *iturite* palm leaves to line the bottom and sides of baskets holding farina and cotton. The men's shoulder, or trinket, box was the same shape as the slightly larger lid which slipped over it.[22] Scraped strips of maranta plant were bleached or stained black.

Modern Caingang[24] (non-Guarani of São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul) make some twilled baskets, like those of the Guayaná, that are of thin strips of split bamboo and are made in two parts that telescope into each other.

Among the northwest Amazons were plaited cane *(Cecropia peltata)* baskets, sometimes with black cane interwoven into the white.[25] The Boro and most of the other tribes north and south used a cylindrical cassava squeezer with loops at each end. The strips, which look like cane but are apparently of a species of *Desmoncus*, were twilled. Most of the manufacture was by women.

16 Wissler, *The American Indian*, p. 238.
17 MacCauley, *Seminole Indians of Florida*, p. 517.
18 Cushing, *Exploration of Ancient Key Dwellers' Remains*, p. 63.
19 Swanton, *Aboriginal Culture of the Southeast*, p. 690.
20 *Idem*, p. 700.
21 Farabee, *The Central Caribs*, p. 23.
22 Farabee, *The Central Arawaks*, p. 23.
23 *Idem*, p. 24.
24 Métraux, *The Caingang*, p. 457.
25 Whiffen, *The North-West Amazons*, pp. 97-98.

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285 Nordenskiöld[26] noted baskets of leaves of *Gynerium* among the Yamiaca,
● 171 Tamboputa-Guarayo (Chima), Atsahuaca, Cavina, Chacobo, Yuracíre, Guarayú (Pauserna and Guarayo), Chimane, and probably among the Mojo. Theirs is the technique of the Piro (referred to later). Square baskets with overlapping lids are known among the Yuracíre, Chimane, Guarayú (Pauserna and Guarayo), Mojo, Chacobo, and Atsahuaca—all located in an area roughly between 60°-70° W longitude and 10°-20° S latitude.[27]

Baskets with overlapping lids showed a general scattering all over South America between the Equator and Curaçao, also between 12°S and about 23°S and 60°-70° W. Both Arawak and Carib of the Guiana Coast evidenced this type.[28] Quite possibly allied in form is basketry found in Peruvian graves.[29]

The Macheyenga[30] (Arawak who lived along the middle course of the Urubamba River in eastern Peru) made good telescope baskets of wild cane for storage of trinkets, clothing, etc., and the Piro[31] (Arawak to the east of the Macheyenga) made the small telescope basket, also common among the Campa, and used them similarly.

Among the tribes of eastern Bolivia and western Matto Grosso, the ancestors of the Mojo (Arawak), like the Guiana Indians, made round telescope baskets and also made flat, circular trays and carrying baskets with hexagonal weave (lattice type).[32]

With reference to extensions of basketry of this general type into Central America, Skinner[33] notes a specimen among the Bribri of Costa Rica of a basket of split palm leaves or of cane, in diagonal twill, and like some of the baskets of the Alibamu, Choctaw, and other Gulf Indians. These rare baskets were used for holding trinkets.

Among the Guiana Indians Im Thurn found many similarities to Antillean basketry. He states[34] that the men were basket makers and the material used for all fine work was the split stems of *Ischnosiphon*, called iturite, other species

26 Nordenskiöld, *Ethnography of South-America*, pp. 198-205.

27 *Idem*, p. 204.

28 Nordenskiöld, *Changes in the Material Culture*, pp. 172-174.

29 As an illustration, the Ulbe collections from Chincha contain "rectangular twilled work baskets, with lid, used to hold spindles, yarn," etc., found in graves of three time periods: Late Chincha I, Late Chincha II, and Inca (and at the period of the Spanish conquest). See Kroeber and Strong, *The Uhle Collections from Chincha*, p. 31.

30 Fawcett, *Indian Tribes of Eastern Peru*, p. 6.

31 *Idem*, p. 56.

32 Métraux, *Native Tribes*, p. 67.

33 Skinner, *Notes on the Bribri of Costa Rica*, p. 62.

34 Im Thurn, *Among the Indians of Guiana*, pp. 278-279.

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of iturite being used for the rougher work. The Arawak, Ackawoi, and Warrau made square pegalls, with lid and baskets of the same shape and overlapping. (The nests of baskets were made as curiosities for Europeans.) Many true Caribs made pegalls of oblong shape. (The Indians of the savannah made round pocket-shaped baskets without lids which they covered with leaves when necessary.) Sometimes basket and lid were made double and leaves *(Ischnosiphon)* were inserted between the layers.

Most baskets were made in the same way and of iturite, split into strips, sometimes peeled, bleached, natural, or stained black.[35] The quakes were loosely woven and lined with iturite leaves. The sides were composed of intermixed leaves and farina or salt.[36] A covering of leaves was added after the basket was full.

The Nikari-karu, a hybrid group on the Brazilian-Guiana border, made their pegalls of the leaves of a palm *(Orbigiguia)*. This was rare in British Guiana, but the shape of the pegalls was square or oblong, like the pegalls of the Arawak.[37]

The basketry of the other islands of the Antilles offer similarities to that of Dominica. The aborigines of Porto Rico[38] used "plaiting" interwoven with leaves to become watertight. Fewkes noted that basketware made in the penitentiary at San Juan during the time of his observation resembled that of the Carib of St Vincent and Dominica. The hammock[39] of the prehistoric Porto Rican "closely resembled some of those still used by the tribes of the Orinoco and manufactured by Indians elsewhere in South and Central America."

Summary

Any conclusions on types of weaves and patterns of baskets must consider first the practical level of materials involved and mechanical limitations of the craft. Generalizations proceeding from any one factor, as type of material used or design, may lead to hasty and unwarranted conclusions. Basketry must be evaluated as a complex encompassing such things as material used, type of weave, ornamentation, quality of work, uses to which the baskets are put, sex dichotomy in basket making, and preparation of materials. When several of the elements of this complex are present, and the time periods permit, we can assume the similarities manifested in various geographically unconnected areas stem from diffusion and are not parrallel outgrowths from comparable mechanical conditions. The available information on the basketry-making areas included in

35 *Idem*, p. 281.
36 *Idem*, pp. 281-282.
37 *Idem*, p. 282.
38 Fewkes, *Aborigines of Porto Rico*, p. 212.
39 *Idem*, p. 34.

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285 this discussion is often mainly that of a description of the baskets themselves.
171 Too hasty an inference that similar design types are related should be avoided. However, the evidence herein assembled tends to support the view that the Antilles, northeastern South America, and southeastern United States form an area having pronounced similarities in basketry. In the Southeast the area extends from North Carolina to Florida (with probable extensions into the Keys) and west to Louisiana. Specific reference has been made to the Antillean islands of Dominica, Porto Rico, San Juan, and St Vincent. Known similarities in culture among other islands of the Antilles suggests a wider distribution there. In South America there are indications of discontinuous distribution extending far beyond the Guiana area. There are southwestward extensions at least to the Macheyenga (approximately 74°W and 12°S) and the Atsahuaca and Yamiaca (approximately 70°W and 15°S). There is another extension at least to the Guarayú (approximately 64°W and 17°S). A northwestward extension goes as far as the Bribri of Costa Rica. Suggestive similarities are found among the modern Caingang (along the Atlantic coast between approximately 20°-33°S).

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101 nibals, — both words derived from the language of these people themselves. He found there natives less advanced than those of the northern islands in the primitive pursuits of peace, but more inured to war, braver, and less disposed to submit.

648 266 Their first reception of the interlopers was a declaration of war, which they sustained so successfully that the Spaniards left them alone for many years, only making descents upon them when they could take them at a disadvantage and enslaving them under an act which allowed the capture and transportation of such as should be proven cannibals. After the enslavement of the rapidly-decreasing natives of the larger islands was prohibited, it was most surprising to find how many "cannibals" the Spaniards discovered. I do not think it has been successfully maintained that the natives of the Lesser Antilles were anthropophagous, but, as it suited the purposes of the Spaniards to have them declared so, thus they have remained, with that stigma attached to their name, to this day.

101 [648] At all events, they were too disagreeable for their discoverers to desire further acquaintance with them, except occasionally, and to this fact is due the survival of their present descendants to-day. Taking the islands in sequence, from Puerto Rico eastward, the first group we find is that of the Virgins, discovered by Columbus on his second voyage to America, and so named by him. Were this a narrative of his discoveries, I should like to linger by the way, and point out to my readers the many incidents of that voyage, and describe the islands as I myself have seen them; but I cannot allow myself that pleasure, but must confine my attention to the facts bearing upon the ancient inhabitants and their present remains. I have not discovered, nor have there been found, many relics of the natives of the Virgins differing from those in other islands farther south, and more numerous.

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000 In the island of St. John are some rocks covered with